



BRIEFLY ABOUT REPORT 2 OF 5 | 2011

# Opinions on Unions and Work

*Views on trade union membership*



The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

# *Summary of the second report*

## *Views on trade union membership*

*The majority of LO members  
consider union membership  
to be of great value as regard  
core union issues such as  
wages, work environment and  
employment protection*

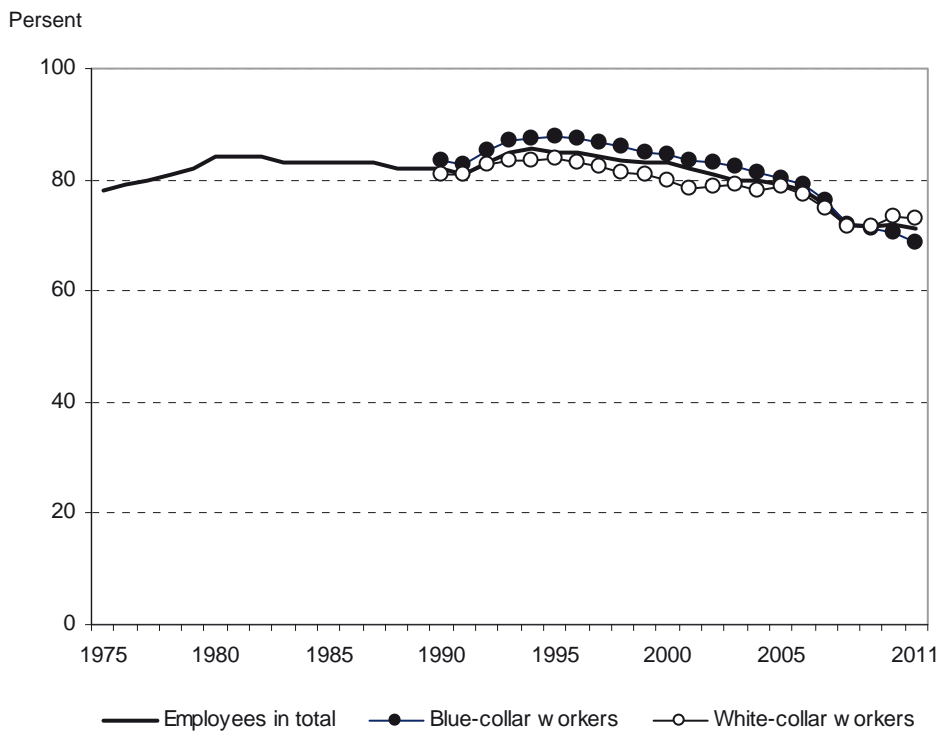
LO, january 2012  
Mats Larsson

## Summary of the second report

In the middle of the 1990s almost 90 percent of workers were members of a trade union. Since then there has been a slow but steady decrease of the union membership. In 2007 the raised fees of unemployment insurance accelerated the decline of affiliated members and during the first quarter of 2011 the quota of the total union membership was the lowest in over 40 years – 69 percent.

The decrease in the number of union members can be explained by the economic turns, structural changes and raised fees of unemployment insurance. However the question is whether there have also been changes in people's attitudes and confidence towards union membership. According to the second part of the report series "Opinions on Unions and Work" – which assess the workers view of union membership – no such signs are yet to be seen.

**Diagram 2.1 Rate of unionisation between 1975–2011**



### The value of the membership

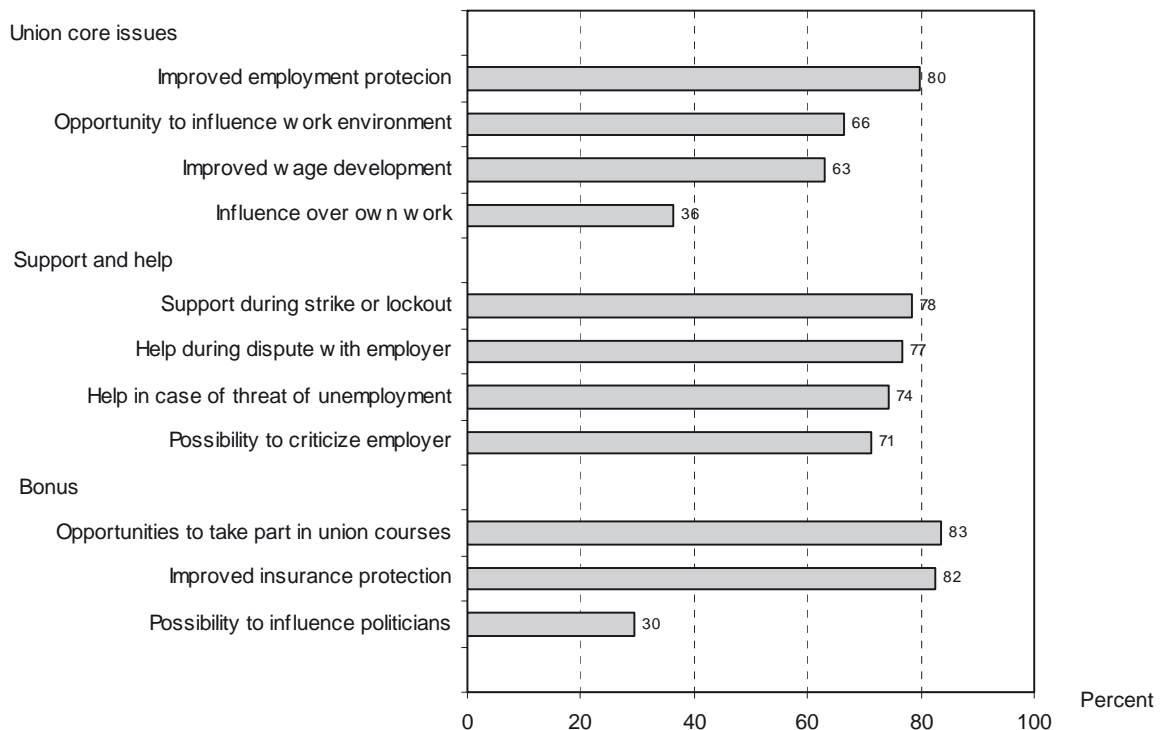
The majority of LO members consider union membership to be of great value as regard core union issues such as wages, work environment and employment protection. Many members also appreciate the support and help the union membership can provide in different situations. It is also highly valued among members that union membership brings advantages regarding insurance and education. valued among the members (see diagram 3.1).

80 percent of all LO members consider the union membership to improve employment protection, 66 percent consider it to give possibilities to influence work environment and 63 percent consider it to improve wage development. However, only 36 percent of LO members consider union membership to improve their own impact on their work.

71 - 78 percent of members consider that union membership gives help and support whenever there is some form of crisis at work, risk of unemployment, strike or lockout or a dispute with the employer.

In addition to this over 80 percent of the members considers that the LO membership gives an improved insurance protection and possibilities to take part in trade union training.

**Diagram 3.1 Values of union membership. LO members 2011**



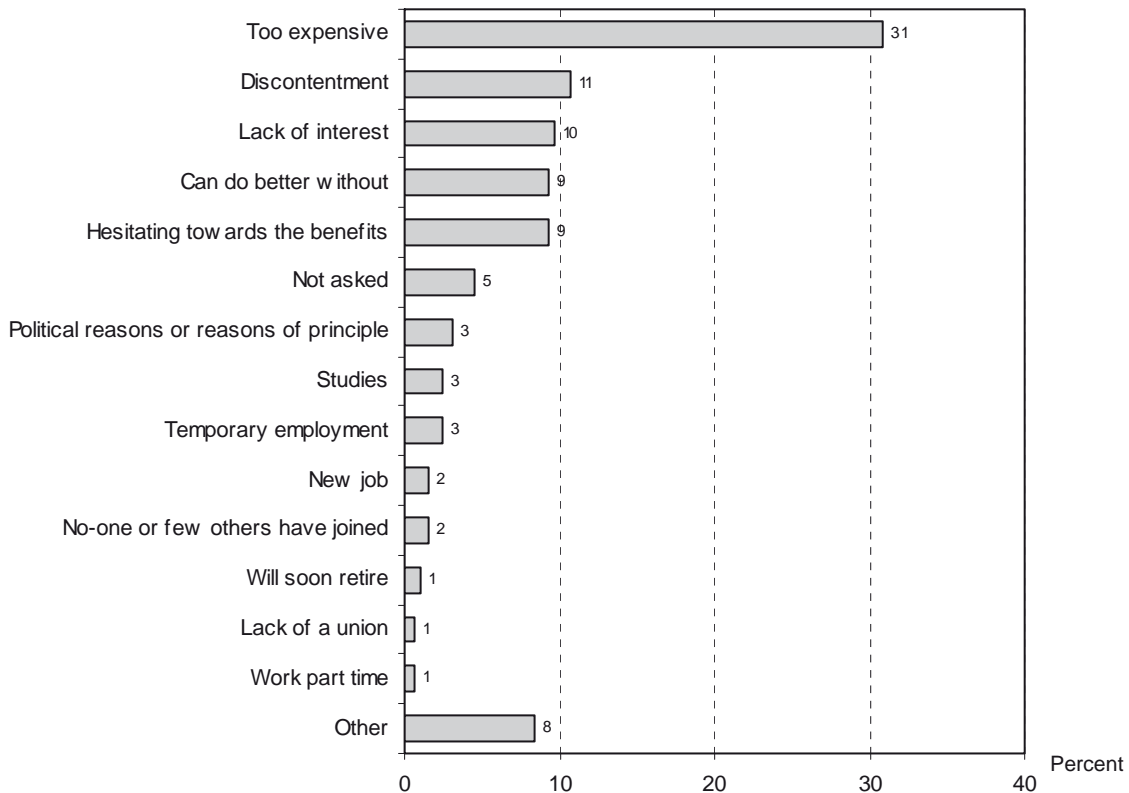
### Slow decrease turned into a boost

Between 1988 and 2006, the advantages of trade union membership tended to be slightly negative within most areas. However, in 2011 a substantial recovery has taken place among the LO members as regards the opinions of the advantages of union membership, both in terms of wage development, employment security and support during conflicts with the employer as well as improved insurance protection.

### Reasons not to join the union – cost, discontentment and indifference

Despite the great values that most people link to union membership almost one third of workers have not joined the union. The main reasons are *discontentment, lack of interest* and *too expensive*. Approximately 30 percent of non-union members state that these are the most important reasons for not being unionized. The remaining 10 percent are less common reasons such as work part time, temporary employment or political reasons (see diagram 4.1).

**Diagram 4.1 Reasons not to join the union**  
Non-union member workers 2011

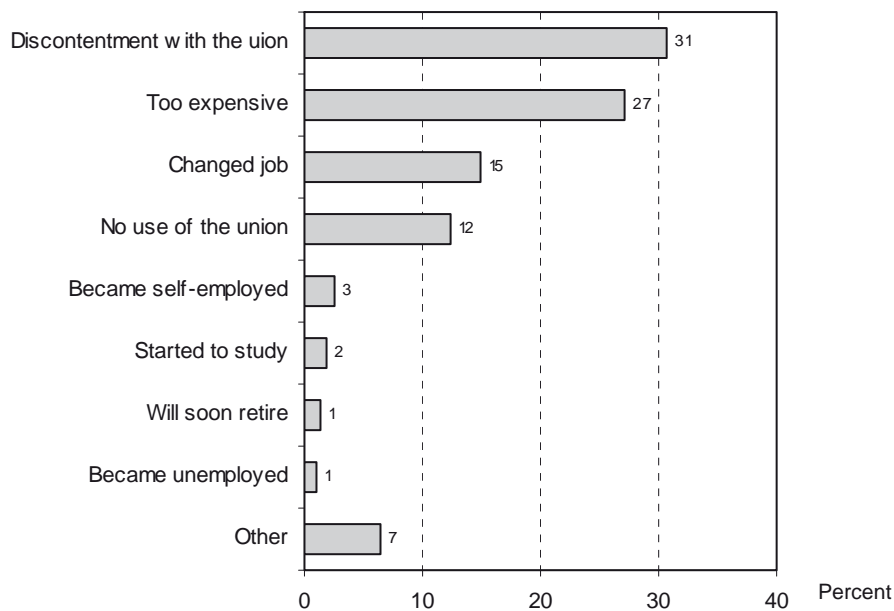


### Reasons to leave the union – discontentment and cost

Most of the former members of the union have left it because of discontentment. Among workers this accounts for 31 percent of those who have left the union, while 27 percent left the union because it was considered to be too expensive, 15 percent left because they changed jobs and 12 percent left the union because they believed they had no need for the membership.

Compared to previous studies, the reason to leave the union because it is too expensive has significantly increased, from 17 percent in 2006 to 27 percent in 2011. Those who left due to discontentment have decreased respectively (see diagram 5.2).

**Diagram 5.2 Reasons to leave the union**  
Non-unionized workers 2011

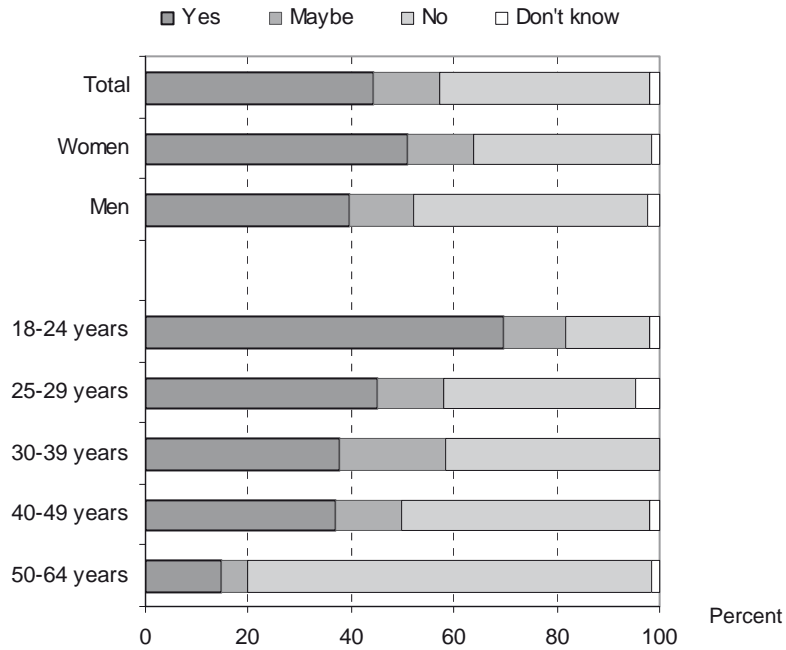


### 57 percent may consider joining

Out of those who are non-union members, 57 percent answered *yes* to the question whether they can consider joining the union, while 41 percent said *no* and 2 percent did not know. The most positive to join the union are adolescents, 82 percent of those between 18-24 years old can consider becoming members (see diagram 6.1).

Compared to previous studies, the number of those who can consider joining the union has increased from 47 percent in 2002 to 57 percent in 2011.

**Diagram 6.1 Can consider to join the union**  
Non-unionized workers 2011



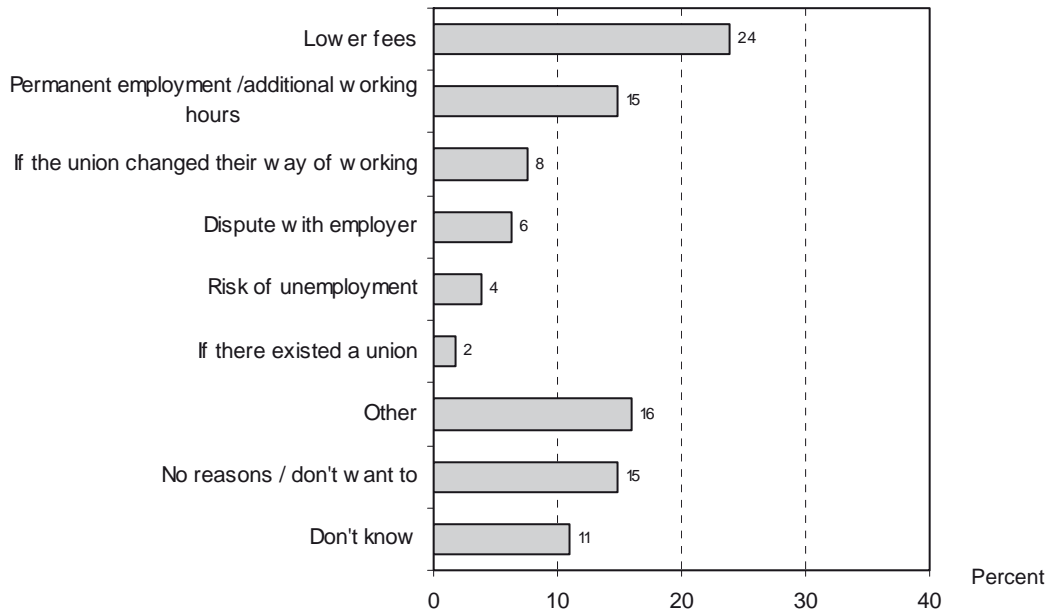
**Lower fees and improved terms of employment most common reasons to join**

The most common reasons for non-members to become union members are a lower membership fees or if they get permanent employment or additional working hours. Among workers, 24 percent state that a lower membership fee is the most decisive factor, while 15 percent state that permanent employment or more working hours that are most decisive. Adolescents are more concerned about permanent employment as the reason for joining the union while it is mainly middle-aged workers that are concerned with membership fees (see diagram 6.3).

Other common reasons to join the union are dispute with the employer, risk of unemployment or if the union changed their way of working.



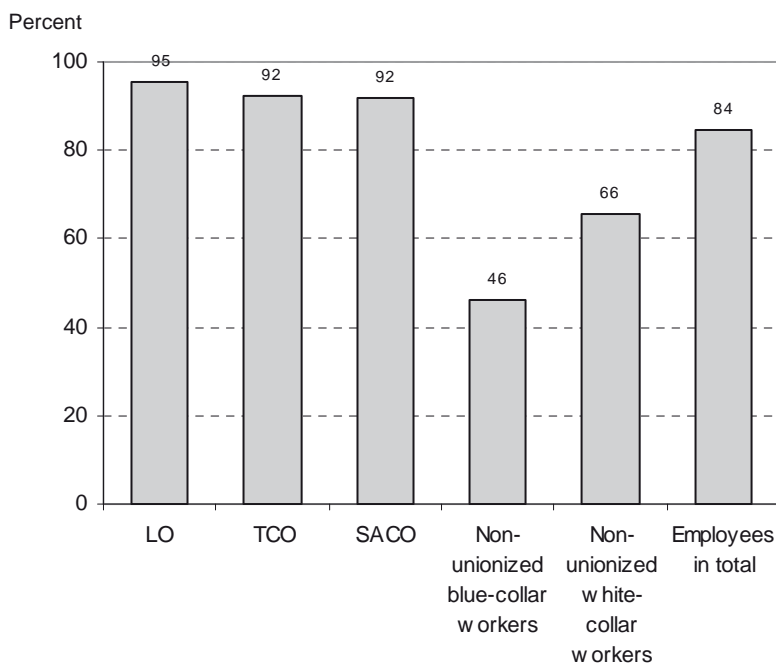
**Diagram 6.3 Decisive reasons to join the union**  
Non-unionized workers 2011



**Membership of unemployment insurance– half the number of non-unionized has not joined the insurance**

Since the raised fees of unemployment insurance were introduced in 2007, more and more people choose not to join the system. However, it is more common among non-unionized workers. Among workers who are non-unionized, less than half (46 percent) have joined the unemployment insurance. In contrast, among LO, TCO and SACO members almost all (92-95 percent) are members of the unemployment insurance (see diagram 7.2).

**Diagram 7.2 Members of unemployment insurance**





### Too expensive, minor risk of unemployment and indifference

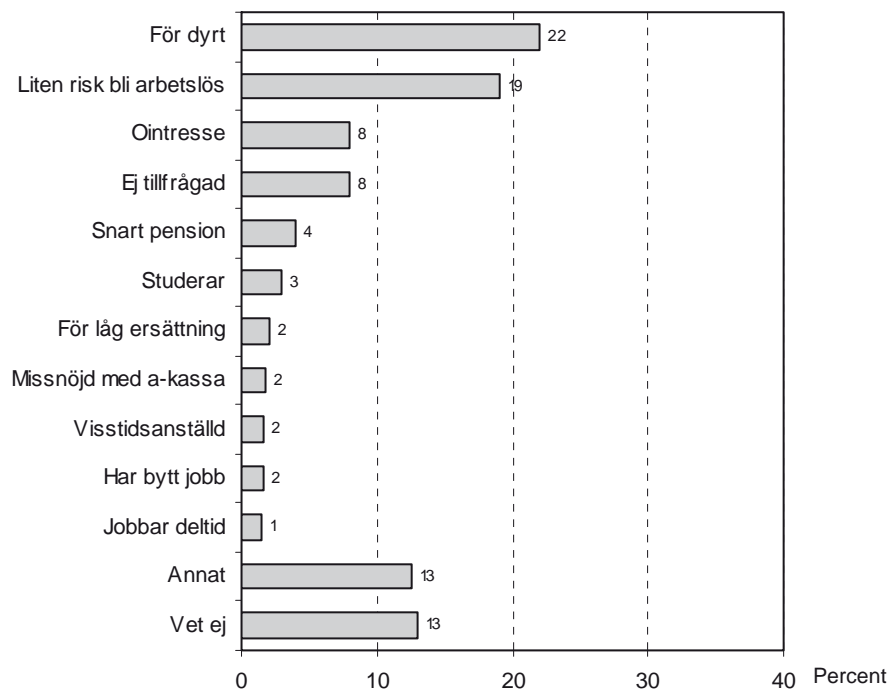
Reasons not to join the unemployment insurance vary between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers. 22 percent of blue-collar workers state that the main reason not to join is that it is too expensive, while 19 percent state that the risk of unemployment is low. These are followed by a number of reasons such as indifference to join. However, this indifference is often due to economic thinking – it is simply too expensive (see diagram 7.4).

For white-collar workers the fee does not seem to be a decisive reason for not join the unemployment insurance, it comes in third place with only 9 percent. Most of white-collar workers state a low risk of unemployment (32 percent) or the fact that they will soon retire (14 percent).

### Conclusions

The conclusion from the second part of the report series “Opinions on Union and Work” and the questions about the view on union membership is that the willingness to join the union is relatively high, as are the considered values of union membership. *However*, more and more people choose not to join either the union or the unemployment insurance mostly due to of the too fees even though many say it is because of lack of interest.

**Diagram 7.4 Reasons not to join the unemployment insurance**  
Blue collar workers



Rapporten kan hämtas som pdf-dokument på LOs hemsida eller  
beställas från LO-distribution:

[lo@strombergdistribution.se](mailto:lo@strombergdistribution.se)

Telefax: 026-24 90 26

Februari 2012

ISBN 978-91-566-2762-0

[www.lo.se](http://www.lo.se)

**PÅ OMSLAGET:**

Marie-Louise Brännström, 48 år, Grafiska/GS-facket,  
maskinoperatör vid Bong Ljungdahl AB i Nybro

FOTO: Lars Forsstedt